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Washington Whispers.

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One of Robert McFarlane's first tasks as Reagan's new national-security aide, insiders say, will be to convince Defense Secretary Weinberger and CIA Director Casey that he is not a "captive" of the State Department and will fairly present to the President their hard-line views on foreign and defense issues.

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U.S. intelligence analysts are baffled by Soviet President Yuri Andropov's long absence—more than six weeks—from public view. One theory is that Andropov has been sidelined by serious illness.